

**Maeghan Rides At The Door at Blackfeet Community College
Issksiniip Project**

I have not always known exactly what I wanted to do for a career but I've always known I would be in a helping profession. Upon graduating with my Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from the University of Montana, I worked three jobs (two at a local mental health center and one at a youth shelter) to support myself and pay off the student loan debt that I had accumulated. I struggled to be on my own for the first time in the so-called "real world" of responsibilities, but during this year I also had the most rewarding experiences of my life. Providing supportive conversation to populations of adults with severe disabling mental illness and adolescents was very fulfilling, and although I didn't always know what to say, I learned that being a good listener was just as important. My desire to professionally counsel people led me to pursue a graduate degree in mental health counseling.

I was beginning my third year of the counselor education program when I first learned of the Issksiniip Project. Although students generally finish the counselor education degree within two years, I had taken the slower track to fulfill my responsibilities of being a partner and a new mother. At this point, I was struggling to finance my education and didn't know how I was going to find the funds to finish my degree. I was in the process of appealing to receive financial aid, and I wasn't eligible to receive assistance from my tribe since they only fund two years of graduate school. I was worried because I had accepted a year-long internship at the campus counseling center, and I wasn't sure how I was going to attend school, do my internship, work a part-time job, and pay for childcare all at the same time. I was afraid I would not be eligible to apply for the Health Professions Opportunity Grant program since there are limited scholarship opportunities to aid mental health counseling students. However, I was ecstatic to learn I was eligible to apply, and to this day I do not know how I would have funded my last year of education without this opportunity. Because of this scholarship I was able to finish my education and gain relevant experience toward my goal of becoming a professional Counselor.

I am proud to say I am now working as a Career Counselor at the same institution where I received my education. I love being able to help students find career paths and become competitive candidates in their fields. I am still in the process of gaining hours toward being applying to become a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, but I am much closer to achieving this goal as a result of this program. I am thankful to be in a position where I can let other students know about the HPOG program.